

## What's On Stage at PAC?

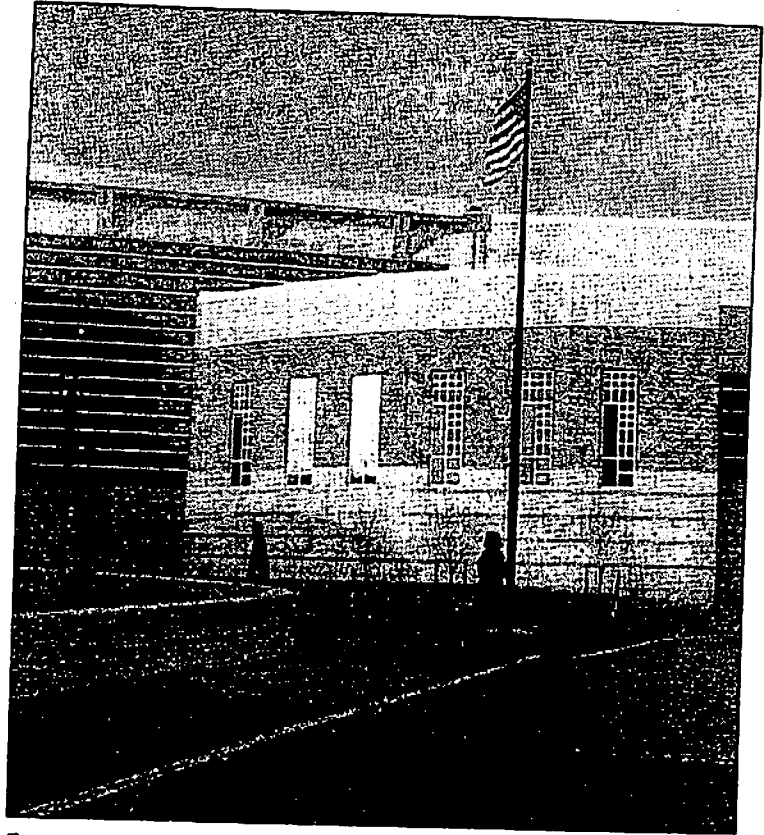
By KEITH L. MARTIN

The crowd may have been small, but the ideas were big on how to best use the new multi-million dollar Performing Arts Center during a community forum on Wednesday.

Sponsored by the school committee, the session drew just over a dozen citizens who offered their own suggestions on how the structure could benefit the schools as well as community groups and other performers.

School Committee Chairman John Heinstadt said that the 1,000-seat center is in its infancy, having only hosted last week's DHS Spring Concert, and that the school department currently had no specific plans on how to use the building.

"We have policy on the general use for school facilities, but not this facility, which can be used as a revenue generator as well as self-supporting," he said. "Right now our policy is that the children of Duxbury schools have top priority."



**From rock concerts to movie nights, there were plenty of ideas at Wednesday's forum for using the Performing Arts Center.**

Assistant Superintendent John Kerrigan said that fundraising is still underway for things that would make the building "more functional and versatile" such as added acoustics equipment and a divider to separate the floor seats from the balcony for smaller performances.

With an original fundraising goal of one million dollars, the effort has raised about \$220,000 to date, but he was hopeful hoped that the opening of the building would result in added donations.

In addition to funds for more equipment, Kerrigan added that money was needed to hire someone to manage the center, with the schools hoping to fund a part-time position to both oversee the building and bring in events in addition to school activities.

What Wednesday's crowd lacked in numbers they made up in experience and input as many addressing Kerrigan, Heinstadt and Business Manager Mickey McGonagle relied on their own personal experiences to help guide the group.

Richard Miller, coordinator of the DHS Thespian Troupe, said he recently spoke

to the manager of a 1400-seat theater in Barnstable which is only dark 76 nights a year. To achieve this in Duxbury, he said, the town needed someone to manage not only the new center, but also performance spots in DHS, DMS and Chandler to bring in groups for performances.

"Personally, I'm not sure part-time is the answer," said Miller. "You want someone with expertise in booking and in planning a complex calendar."

He suggested that by opening these spaces for both local and outside groups, revenue could be generated to afford a manager. He hoped this manager would be a teacher that could also work to incorporate more arts into the schools.

Throughout the night, many other speakers echoed the need for at least one, full-time employee to manage the facility and possibly another to control booking and scheduling.

Resident Tony Kelso felt that while schools should come first, the "next level" of opening up the facility should be local and regional performance organizations.

"This will benefit all of us, including our school children who can interact with these groups," he said.

Resident Carrie Johnson added that she has helped

book creative acts and said that many of these groups would welcome working with students during the day as Kelso suggested and then performing at night.

Kelso added that an important element is good public relations to define what the center is and what it could be to citizens.

"We've heard that it is 'so big' and 'so much money' and yes, it is, and yes, it did cost a lot, but the benefits over time will be huge," said Kelso.

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## 'Center' of Attention

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Pat Weatherlaw, also with the DHS Thespian Troupe, said that a plan needs to be put in place before the first group is invited in. She also added that the building features very complex and high-tech equipment and that a policy should be put in place for its use and who will operate it so it lasts for a long time to come.

School committee member John Magnarelli said that the center, in addition to being beneficial for the arts, also provides the school system with unique learning experiences in potentially creating courses for students in working lighting and other theatre management skills. He added that if concessions were going to be a part of every performance then that too could also be a course for high school students in managing such a business.

Music Director Ric Madru said that his experience in the building during the spring concert was fantastic but joked that he was scared he'd put the first scratch or stain on the new building. He said that the school needed to enlist more support from the community and that "arts are the only thing some people will open their wallet for."

Madru added that a Duxbury family who wishes to remain anonymous has already donated \$94,000 for three

pianos for the center's use.

After the forum, Heinstadt said that he heard a lot of informative input from citizens in attendance.

"There are a lot of residents of Duxbury with experience in this area and I would hope we could tap their experience to at least put the plan together for the center," he said. "I think it was heard loud and clear from those who did have experience that we really do need someone to manage it, both the technical side and the scheduling side."

McGonagle agreed and said the issue is finding funding for these managers and that a plan must be put in place before outside performers take the stage.

"I didn't want to open the building to wide-scale commercial purposes for two reasons," he said. "For one, I wanted to make sure the town wanted it for that purpose and two, we are not ready for it. We need the right people involved before we move onto the next step. Hopefully what happened tonight gives the school committee food for thought and we can develop a plan by next fall."

McGonagle also provided an update on the building, saying that there is still one outstanding issue with the town's building inspector on an upper level handicapped ramp, but other than that "the facility is ready to go."



**A little over a dozen citizens turned out Wednesday night to offer their views on how the town can best utilize the new Performing Arts Center.**